Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America

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Two distinguished Mennonite historians, writing twenty-eight years apart, illustrate the Mennonite problem of thinking about the relationship between faith and culture. In 1968, John A. Toews, the premier Mennonite Brethren (MB) historian of his generation, defined the issue by juxtaposing culture over against Christian faith. Culture was the product of human achievement. It was not to be confused with Christian faith. He joined the familiar Mennonite litany in noting that Christian faith is supra-cultural and supra-national. Invoking the litany, true as it seemed, did not, however, solve the problem. Toews knew well enough that the issue was a constant one. He wrote: "The tension between a particular culture and Christian ethics can never be fully resolved and no final solution of the problem is ever possible."[1]

If Toews found the problem theologically perplexing, there were certain postures that historically defined how Mennonites thought about culture. He suggested that two persuasions dominated Mennonite reflection: a repudiation of "foreign" culture and a repudiation of "urban" culture. The two positions characterized the Dutch/Prussian Mennonite world at least since the time of their migration from the Netherlands to the Vistula Delta. In this new German region, these Dutch Mennonites persisted with their Dutch cultural traditions for more than 200 years before adopting the prevailing German ways. The next migration repeated the process with the newly Germanicized folks idealizing German culture during their sojourn in Russia (one might add that some do so even to this day). As German culture earlier had been inimical to faith, so now was the Russian culture. Acculturation to the ways of this host society carried with it the probability of surrendering the faith. The story of resistance to English language and North American cultural traditions is only the latest episode in this fear that a new cultural system will more assuredly threaten the faith than the inherited system.

The second posture common to Mennonites was a repudiation of urban

culture. Toews wrote: ''the Christian faith became closely linked to a rural culture. The 'Bible and the plow' (Bibel and Pflug) became symbols of our way of life.''[2] Urbanization was linked to higher education, big business and professionalism, all areas where the traditional *bauernethik* would not be readily usable. Toews seemed unsure whether this anti–urbanism was to be understood as a biblical, perhaps even prophetic, insight or if it was an example of cultural lag. The future might reveal the city a place amenable to biblical faith. What was clear was that Christian faith and ethics did transcend time, space and change. It was the church's responsibility to formulate biblical principles which could incorporate change without sacrificing the enduring spiritual and ethical values.

This position that saw the relationship between faith and culture in conflictual terms was repeated in the 1975 *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. Here he was even more explicit: ''Throughout the history of the M.B. Church faith and culture have often been in conflict. Occasionally serious tensions developed in the brotherhood when adaptation to cultural change was interpreted as ethical compromise.''[3]

In 1938, C. Henry Smith, the acknowledged Dean of North American Mennonite historians of his generation, published an essay, ''Mennonites and Culture,'' that presumed the subject entailed an enumeration of the contributions Mennonites had made to Western culture.[4] Mennonites, like other social movements, had both conserving and liberating elements. It was the liberating, however, which contributed toward cultural development, at least in the mind of this quintessential Mennonite progressive.

For Smith the great Mennonite contribution to the West was the separation of church and state and the commitment to religious toleration. The first was more political; the second legitimated the religious separatists, whose numbers included not only the European Anabaptists but also the English nonconformists and Baptist groups of colonial America. The struggle to achieve religious liberty, while long and bitter in Anglo–European history, emerged out of the logic of early Anabaptism.

Mennonites also made other enduring contributions to Western culture. Closely connected both logically and historically to the refusal to admit religious coercion was the principle of non–resistance applied to individual and political life.[5] Mennonite industry, frugality, agricultural skill and simple virtue encouraged economic development in various countries. The Dutch Mennonites' contribution to high culture, commerce and industrial life could be rivaled by few other small religious groups.[6]

Outside commentators looking at the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition from a different angle of vision have been unsure as to the Mennonite relationship to culture. Ernst Troeltsch, in his *Social Teachings of the Christian Church* (1911), defined the sectarian tradition (Mennonites included) almost wholly in their rejection of and detachment from worldly culture. ''The ascetic ideal of the sects consists simply in opposition to the world and its social institutions.''[7] H. Richard Niebuhr's classic book of 1951, *Christ*

and Culture, identified the Anabaptist–Mennonite tradition as one affirming the authority of Christ and negating the loyalty claims of any cultural tradition.[8] Rosemary Reuther's Anabaptists, however, were the prototype of the Western revolutionary. Their apocalyptic fervor was unbounded and radical. By shunning the "principle of institutionalization and historical perpetuation" their ascetic ideal unleashed transforming and culturally regenerative forces.[9]

These differing interpretations about the relationship between faith and culture reveal the importance of the issue. The dramatic moments in Mennonite history — martyrdom, schisms and migrations — are largely conflicts about faith and culture. That may be characteristic of religious traditions that begin with ethics rather than with doctrinal or liturgical definitions of what it means to be the people of God. The Anabaptist–Mennonite world has generally experienced theological agreement, a liturgical harmony, and widely differing relationships to the larger culture.[10]

The importance of the faith/culture issue in Mennonite life is heightened by the ethno–religious quality. The Mennonite Brethren, like virtually all other Anabaptist groups, are a religious ethnic group. Many (at least North Americans) still share a common religious and common cultural heritage and a subjective sense of group identity. They are carriers of a history, a set of unique experiences by virtue of religious idealism, the persecution and social exclusion that followed. They have been a double minority — religious and ethnic.

The sharply articulated two kingdom theology, while forged out of a hermeneutical community, was also nourished by cultural segregation. From Menno Simons' radical dualism the line of separation between the community of the redeemed and the larger society has been fastened to almost all Mennonite theologizing. The world (culture) is depicted as the realm of darkness, under the power of the fallen one. The loyalty of the believer is directed towards a new order incarnated by Christ and sustained by his people who have chosen to separate themselves from the old order. Mennonite history is largely the story of wandering over the face of the earth in search of a separate place. Even after the forced enclavement Mennonites maintained a voluntary enclavement. MBs today still live in large numbers in Winnipeg, Clearbrook, Hillsboro and Reedley (and other places) not because of discrimination, but because of the preferred identity system of the enclaved group.[11]

This history of religious, cultural and psychological enclavement among the MBs is surely part of the reason the Christ against culture position, as articulated by John A. Toews, has been imaginatively the normative and dominant one in MB thinking. Yet like most ethno–religious groups the relationship to surrounding culture has hardly been singular. MBs have been torn betwen an ethnic and religious separatism and assimilation into the dominant ways. They have both resisted and eagerly sought contact with the larger cultural world.

A discussion about the relationship between twentieth century North American MB people and the surrounding culture contains at least three differing starting points: an expansive, an assimilative, and a separatist position. The three positions are not mutually exclusive and can be found in most periods of the recent MB past. While the three understandings are illustrated in a sequential fashion, they should be thought of as typological as well as historical. Choosing the pre–World War I period to examine the expansive, the immediate post–World War II period to illustrate the separatist and the current period to outline the assimilative does not imply their dominance for that era. There are historical factors that give each currency at a particular moment. But history is always contradictory and bipolar. The case could be made for the presence of the alternative positions in each era.

The Expansive View

On the plains of Kansas is a college built by Mennonite peasants, one generation removed from their own humble sod houses, that imitates classical Grecian architecture. Its facade is adorned with urns and modified ionic pillars. The Tabor College administration building houses a liberal arts college that from its inception aimed to produce elevated minds, expansive temperaments and harmonize scholarly investigation and biblical truth. Its founder, H. W. Lohrenz, was categorical in the defense of the liberal arts education: "There is nothing that can substitute for a good liberal education . . . this enrichment is something that is of far greater value than any material possession . . . There are no earthly goods that a father can leave to his child which are of greater value than an education of the right kind."[12]

Lohrenz was not only one of the founders of Tabor and its President from 1908–1931, but also the central figure among North American Mennonite Brethren in the first half of the twentieth century. He was Dean of the Tabor Bible School for an additional 9 years; Chairman of the General Conference of MB Churches for 9 years; Chairman of the Board of Missions for 17 years and Executive Secretary of the Foreign Mission program for 9 years. His career touched virtually all segments of the conference between his ascendancy in 1908 and his death in 1945.

In a series of addresses and articles, and in the nature of the College that emerged, he showed his own commitments to an expansive linkage of faith, education and culture. A 1912 article on the Sunday schools revealed his openness to modern cultural developments infusing the church. He was impressed that advances of scientific investigation and social reform had preceded a "great reconstructive work in commercial and industrial lines." He now wished to bring those new principles into the life of the church and saw the Sunday School as the agent for such reconstruction.[13]

Much later, in 1938, Lohrenz delivered an address, "Contributions of American Mennonite Colleges to Home and Society," at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Bethel College. It was an artful weaving of the

responsibility of the Mennonite college to preserve, refine and awaken. The preserving function included the essential values of faith and Mennonite life. Refining involved purifying the esthetic, literary and musical talents of the students. Lohrenz linked the refinement of these sensibilities to the development of character and to a more spacious spirit. The human mind and spirit that was cultivated could more fully encounter the divine. The last contribution of the Mennonite college to society was to develop an appreciative patriotism, a cosmopolitan citizenship and a response to world needs.[14]

The student organizations that emerged in the new college reflect an expansive spirit. The first was the Olympian Literary Society, founded during the inaugural year. The Debating Club followed in 1909, the YMCA and YWCA in 1910 and 1911, and the Intercollegiate Prohibition Association and Reform League in 1912. The Student Volunteer Movement, more frequently called the Mission Band, began in 1914.

These student organizations, like other elements of the college, point to its connectedness with the larger cultural, political and religious world. While the YMCA, YWCA and Student Volunteer Movement were clearly devoted to the moral and spiritual nurture of their members, they were also heirs of the social activism of nineteenth century American evangelicalism. These organizations at the national level were part of the crusading temperament in American protestantism at the turn of the century. Devoted primarily to world mission and evangelization, they also worked with considerable effort at the reform and purification of American culture. They were the bridge that linked the religious conservatives with the political progessives.[15]

Familiarity with the larger culture was reflected in other ways. The first Annual, issued in 1916 and covering the first eight years of the school, included terms describing either individuals or entire classes. Individual members of the 1913 class were described as ''hopeful optimist; revolutionary; undecided and skeptical; versatile pedagogue; cold haughty and distant; energetic, active and progressive; doubtfully optimistic.'' The class of 1915 was defined by a set of terms applicable to the entire class. The complete description reads: ''classical, socratic, calm, healthy, congenial, strong, enthusiastic, triumphant, prominent, hospitable, benevolent, didactic, liberal, implicit, humble, amiable, accurate, frank, heedful, specific, subjective, unblemished, non-resident, modest, premier, joyful, sociable, perseverent.''[16]

Both sets of descriptions were the language of the early twentieth century with its faith in itself, its skepticism, its irreverence about many inherited cultural traditions. It was hardly the language of the Mennonite congregation. Neither was it profane language. It was the language of an era that was able to be both cosmopolitan and Christian, both sacred and secular, both moralistic and pious.

The expansive spirit nourished also a specific identification with cultural and national achievements. The retention of German culture was a frequent theme among these early Taborites. While some may have argued for lan-

guage continuity on the grounds that German was the language of the soul and of familiar religious discourse, others wished for its preservation because of its linkage to a noble culture. An unidentified writer in the *Tabor College Herald* (November 1916) argued for the maintenance of the German language because it would show "weakness of character" to "forget that we come from the noblest stock in the world. What nationality can boast of nobler ancestry? The Trustees were a strong and healthy race. They were pure and honest of heart and had the noblest aspirations. After they accepted the Christian religion, there were no other people more true to the faith."[17] The loss of the German language in these odes to German culture seemed to presage the loss of cultural and religious vitality. The German people had combined culture, political and religious achievements in a way that suggested the vitality of each was proportional to the presence of the others. The linkage made it as easy to applaud the political/economic/cultural achievements as it was to praise their religious devotion.

As early as 1901 Lohrenz, in a speech to the German Verein at McPherson College, linked the perpetuation of German culture with the retention of religious faith. The point of the intersection between the two was not that German was the language of faith but that it was the language of a superior culture. American and German culture had many elements which were honorable and could be recommended to Mennonite people. German culture should be respected because American culture "will be almost always misunderstood to those who despise their own culture, who stir it into the dirt and spoil their Christentum along with their Deutschtum. Therefore it is the duty of every German . . . to disseminate German ways of thinking and true Christianity at the same time."[18]

The German who had no self-esteem about his own culture would be unable to appreciate the noble aspects of American culture. But beyond this affection for cultural development lurked also the pervasive American belief that religious, cultural and political developments were interrelated. If that were true in a general rather than specific way, then one could applaud either American or German developments.

That linkage became more apparent with the veneration of American culture. Much as Germany was exalted because of its high culture and religiosity, so American society was worthy of affection. In the October 1916 issue of the *Tabor College Herald* J. H. Lohrenz and Adolf Frantz were hopeful of the nation's future. For Lohrenz America was a bulwark of freedom, prosperity and virtue. Its preservation was important because of the intersection of morality, civilization and cultural attainments.[19]

Frantz pushed the linkage further. Christianity, by solving the social, political and cultural problems of American society, would position the nation for bringing the gospel to the farthermost corners of the earth. In its hands lay the destiny of the world. He wrote: "Such then are our opportunities for the future. Will we dare to grasp them? Will we lead the world in the things which are noble and just? It is ours to dare and do; it is ours to

neglect and rue. In our hands lie the momentous issues of the future. We will pay the price, we will dare and do."[20] In other writings of the *Tabor College Herald* these themes are articulated with consistency. Since civilization and Christianity were handmaidens, it was logical to value civilization's attainments because they buffered the demise of faith.[21]

The college emerged at a moment in MB history when pietism and social activism, expansiveness and conservatism were present in ways that nurtured a strong linkage of personal religious development and broader cultural responsibility. This expansiveness was not alien to the sympathies of the 1860 birth of the MBs nor the parallel cultural and intellectual developments in Russia before World War I. Some Russian Mennonites moved easily and with assurance in the larger cultural circles of both Russia and Western Europe. They felt increasingly at home in the universities and commercial centers. The early Tabor College graduates felt at home in the universities of the States. Among the many pursuing graduate study were M. H. Schlichting, A. J. Harms, Adolf Frantz, and P. S. Goertz who earned B.D.'s at Yale Divinity School and then returned to teach at Tabor during the 1920s. They were confident that they could achieve an accommodation between the faith of the smaller ethno-religious community and the culture of American society.

The Separatist View

The 1951 General Conference meeting in Winkler reflected a different approach to the question of faith and culture. The Board of Reference and Counsel issued a four-part report that revealed the degree to which the social movement of the intervening decades questioned the expansiveness of the earlier era. The Committee composed of B. J. Braun, J. B. Toews and H. R. Wiens of the Pacific District, J. W. Vogt and H. H. Flaming of the Southern District Conference, and B. B. Janz and A. H. Unruh of the Northern District addressed the North American MB church, though the trends they described were clearly more apparent in the United States.

The first section, "A Frank Analysis of our Spiritual Status," noted the "revolutionizing changes" of the recent past that had come as the consequence of "educational opportunities" and "economic advantages." Those changes added up to a pluralism which now threatened the security and health of church polity, doctrine and ethics. Most distressing was the shift in the nature of leadership. Formerly both congregational and denominational leaders emerged from "within" the selection and training system of the local congregation and the direction of the "elder." It was a system that nurtured both "strength and stability." This leadership was "thoroughly indoctrinated with all Scriptural principles of belief and practice." The system maintained unity and consistency.

The newer system of selecting leaders from professional training schools often made them outsiders and frequently singular in contrast to the plurality of congregationally trained persons. These "one man pastorates" compro-

mised both the "organizational and instructional principles" of individual churches and threatened to engulf the entire conference. While the committee thought the church had been "preserved from . . . serious inroads of rank modernism," doctrinal unity was threatened. The problems were summarized as being four: 1) an absence of "clearly defined Scriptural guidance"; 2) "an increasing position of indefiniteness and difference of interpretation"; 3) "an absence of unity"; and 4) "a hesitancy in accepting defined statements of . . . distinction about being a separated people from the world."[22]

The third section of the document, "Proposed Ways and Means to be Considered as a Possible Way to Meet the Expressed Needs and Strengthen Existing Weaknesses," revealed more pointedly the issue troubling the Board. The history of conference polity included contradictory currents. The strong tradition of congregational autonomy was hinged to an equally strong sense of "brotherhood" which implied authority and consensus. It was the latter that was increasingly frayed. The church had moved from "brotherhood" where the elders in a "collective relationship offered a strong unified leadership" to an "associative" ideal where congregational freedom threatened the unity and coherence of the conference.[23]

Behind the analysis were objective changes. By 1950 most of the US churches utilized paid pastorates hired from beyond their membership. The Brethren were training at various Seminaries and Bible Institutes around the country. The 1951 General Conference noted that people working in the church had received training at Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and Interdenominational schools.[24] In the early 1940s there began a two-decade movement of Tabor graduates to Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City. By 1950 there were already twelve graduates. In the US the transition from German to English was largely completed during the 1940s.

The report, drafted initially by the California members of the Board, also reflected the leading edge of the social revolution that was increasingly taking the Mennonite Brethren beyond their relatively bounded communities. Mennonite Brethren in Reedley, the largest of the MB communities, were full participants in the commercial and political life of the town. Though a population minority, they dominated certain critical economic sectors, elected one of their own as mayor and, in a pitched political battle, gained a controlling position in the leadership of the public school system. Other MB communities show similar patterns.

The cumulative impact of the North American experience was obvious by the 1940s and 1950s. Mennonites had historically lived by "privilegiums," and by the protective barrier of village isolation. Distinctive language, ethnic seclusion and traditionalism all maintained a cultural distance that bounded the interaction of most Russian Mennonites with the host society during the first decades of their sojourn in North America. The Mennonite Brethren had historically cultivated their social ethics in the context of a "corpus culturum." The cumulative impact of the North American experience was obvious by the 1940s and 1950s. The reality of pluralism and the accompany-

ing demise of cultural isolation was felt everywhere, but more acutely in the West. The move west (in both Canada and the United States) offered greater opportunities for individualism.[25]

The 1951 Reference and Counsel statement reflecting these new realities, called for new structures of authority and refurbished carriers of MB historic identity to maintain distance from North American culture. The responses to the continuing social revolution and its new patterns of interaction were the proposed revival of a Board of Elders and the publication of four books: a history of the church, a description of polity, a book of doctrine, and a history of missions. The Board of Elders was designed to safeguard both polity and doctrine. They were to study all questions of doctrine and polity, hold regional conferences "especially designed to establish our ministers, pastors and other Christian workers in the principles of faith and doctrine."[26] Their function was clearly to be more authoritative than the Board of Reference and Counsel. The problem with Reference and Counsel was that it only "advises and aids" congregations "when serious questions arise concerning doctrine and church polity."[27] That was adequate when "our church leadership was still largely a product from within the church; and our congregations were more isolated from the trends of modern philosophies, various theological schools, and rapid social changes through language and culture which constituted a guardian against constant influences which today test and challenge the established principles of faith and policies in the local church and Conference."[28] Now more was needed. The Board of Elders would provide "strong unified leadership."[29] Their "ruling . . . shall be considered final" subject only to the review and change of the Conference itself.[30]

The call for a series of histories and clarifications of doctrine and polity were ostensibly done as preparation for the centennial commemorations coming in 1960. But the proposal for four volumes entailed more than the celebration of a 100-year history. The volumes on polity and doctrine were closely linked to the creation of a Board of Elders in that both would aid in solidifying the central tenets and structures of MB life.

The proposals were an example of what Bernard Siegal terms "defensive structuring." It is a strategy that groups appropriate to preserve their identity against what they perceive as fundamental threats. Among the specific adaptations such groups make, Siegel includes the exercise of greater authoritarian control by a small elite, high rates of endogamy, the cultivation of cultural identity symbols and early socialization for impulse control.[31]

The proposed Board of Elders was too far-reaching to be accepted at the General Conference. It was sent to the regional Conferences for discussion and there was rejected by all. Its most sustained opposition came from the Ontario and British Columbia provincial conferences. The four volumes projected for 1960 fared somewhat better. A. H. Unruh's *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde, 1860-1954* was completed, but in a language that limited its role as a carrier of identity for the coming decades. The

English version came in 1975 with the publication of J. A. Toews' *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. The missions history turned out to be a four volume project with three published during the seventies and eighties. The volumes on polity and doctrine remain uncompleted.[32]

These attempts at creating a renewed separatism through a revitalized authority structure and a heightened sense of history were at best only marginally successful. The Board of Elders proposal was rejected because it contradicted the developing radical congregationalism. The defining of the historical symbols of identity achieved significance in the 1970s, not in the 1940s and 1950s. But the increased historical activity (publication of J. A. Toews, translation of P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910*, the creation of the Centers for Mennonite Brethren Studies) came not as a reinforcer of the separatist posture, but as an antidote to the more recent assimilative phase of Brethren reflection about faith and culture.

The Assimilative View

The current discussion of the faith and culture question largely hinges on the issue of ethnicity. It is the question of whether Mennonite Brethren are an ethnic group and whether ethnicity has anything to do with Biblical faith. The discussion is surely appropriate for an ethno-religious tradition. Mennonites became an ethnic community in the classic sense of that term — a people with a distinctive sense of peoplehood. Milton Gordon explains that within ethnic groups there develops a "network of organizations and informal social relationships which permits and encourages the members of the ethnic group to remain within the confines of the group for all of their primary relationships and some of their secondary relationships throughout all the stages of the life cycle."[33]

Within such groups, religious expression and meanings and socio-cultural expressions and interactions are frequently parallel and indeed mutually reinforcing. The immigrant church served the allegiance of the ethnic group. Church membership became a symbolic rite to affirm one's ethnic associations. The Church service became an important vehicle for preserving the ethnic language. Schools were established under the aegis of the church to inculcate both religious and ethnic values.

Ethno-religious groups, however, are not static. They typically evolve through various stages in their immigration and adaptation to a new society. The movement is from particularity to identification with the national society.[34] The last stage in the process is an assimilation into the national cultural religious system. This is characterized by the ethnic group's loss of the church as the "dynamic center of the group."[35] The increasing Mennonite Brethren assimilation into American and Canadian culture is well documented in the recently completed Mennonite Brethren Church Membership Profile study. Such suggestions surface in virtually all of the findings and interpretative articles.[36]

The assimilative process inevitably entails a rethinking of the relationship between faith and culture. The current discussion centers on the shape of culture and faith within the Mennonite subculture as well as the Mennonite relationship to the dominant culture. Two recent articles, Wally Kroeker's, "'So you're not really one of us': One View of Mennonite Ethnicity," *Christian Leader* (1985), and Jim Coggins', "Since you are Mennonite . . .," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (1986), and John Redekop's book, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (1987), are pleas to distinguish the ethnic from the religious.[37] For all the problem is that the ethnic gets in the way of the religious. They find that the ethnic remnant makes it more difficult for newcomers to enter into the church and that the publicity about Mennonite culture obscures the reality of Mennonite faith. Both concerns are appropriate for they are issues the church must face. Yet the proposed unhinging of the cultural and the religious, which all suggest, is hardly a realistic alternative. It suggests that faith exists without cultural forms. Christian faith transcends culture and nationality. But it is also incarnational. It takes on the human shape and thus is also cultural. That is its genius. It is not ethereal. It is not only a mystical experience that floats above cultural realities. It becomes embedded in particular socio-historical moments. The Biblical writers tell the story of God within the framework of available cultural material. The Bible is steeped in the language and imagery of Babylonian, Hittite, Jewish, Hellenistic and other Mediterranean cultures.[38] That means the problem of disentangling faith from culture is both an impossible and necessary task. Impossible because it cannot be done, and yet necessary in order to minimize the propensity to confuse the two.

For Mennonites troubled by the linkage of faith and culture, it is tempting to think that other groups have been more successful at separating the two. Mennonites wishing to unhinge the two, frequently find it convenient to join various American and Canadian evangelical groups. Evangelicalism, which ought to be disinguished from evangelical theology, however, also has ethnic or tribal qualities. It is the story of a peculiar group of people in American and Canadian society that have their own traditions. They are distinguished by their history, language, music, dress, style of architecture, organizations and many other things. To "real" ethnics, this looser form of association appears sufficiently camouflaged that it seems not to be ethnic. Some experience it as expansive, but others find it constrictive. It is constrictive because it is a form of cultural faith just as surely as the Mennonite Brethren are a form of cultural faith. Those Mennonites hankering after evangelicalism are not getting rid of ethnicty, just replacing it with a form slightly disguised.

The current call for the distancing of faith and culture is congruent with the modern cultural situation. We are witnessing a growing segmentaton whereby different realms function with their autonomous principles. Daniel Bell describes a world in which differing principles govern the political, economic, personal and symbolic realms. So also the current regulative

principles fracture and segment faith and culture. It is part of the growing autonomy of various spheres from the sacred which once held them together.[39]

Conclusion

Paul Tillich once noted that "religion is the substance of culture and culture the substance of religion." Mennonite Brethren may reject the equation as being too equal. Historically they have not always been sure of the proportions, but the equation has never been far from their imagination.

The Brethren in all three modes of reflection about the dynamics of faith and culture — the expansive, separatist and assimilative — sought to define an appropriate relationship. The differing positions suggest the degree to which a cultural situation impacts understanding.

The expansive position emerged in a time analogous to what the Russian Mennonites came to call a "golden age." Both Russian and American Mennonites were prospering. Both were still living in largely confined societies. The Russian communities were geographically enclaved. The American Mennonites were culturally and psychologically bounded. From the relative security and strength of their ethno–religious communities both could reach beyond, hoping thereby to nourish themselves and those with whom they came in contact. Like C. Henry Smith's generation they could face the contribution of Mennonites to cultural development without assuming the demise of their own cultural system.

The recent articulation of the separatist view came when the boundaries of the North American MB communities were increasingly more permeable. Still the Mennonite Brethren were a people identifiable from the larger culture. The call for separation was selective. It called not for the separation of faith and all culture, but rather sought to preserve faith from what was perceived to be a threatening American and Canadian culture.

The assimilative view is in reality a new form of separatism. Here the call is not for a selective separation, but rather for a wholesale rejection of any linkage between faith and a particular culture. Its call for the separation of faith and culture, issued by a people increasingly bereft of a discernable cultural tradition, implies not distance from the larger culture but the disintegration of any faith/cultural relationship. Once the call to the separation of faith and culture retarded Mennonite assimilation, now it accelerates it.

I have illustrated the expansive and separatist positions primarily by reference to the US experience. The assimilative knows no national boundary. It seems as apparent in Canada with its official policy of multiculturalism as in the US with its historic melting pot theory. It is easy in both societies to confuse the institutional separation of church and state with the presumed necessity to distance Mennonite faith from all culture.

There is an irony to our present attempts to unhinge faith and culture. All across North America and around the world the Christian awakening is that the Church must always create a distinctive culture that stands separate from

the cultural orders of the day. Mennonites are now being embraced as an authentic witness to the meaning of the Gospel in part because of the tradition of Mennonite faith also shaping a Mennonite culture.

There are contradictory signals as to whether the immediate future will offer a downpayment on a new determination for faith to shape culture or a further separation of faith from culture. If emancipation of faith from culture is our concern then we are on the front edge of modernity, for that is what modernity does. If we are seeking a new linkage, then we are on the back side (post–modern) for that is the passion of those who have moved through the emancipative glory and fragmentation of modernity.

Notes

[1] John A. Toews, "Cultural Change and Christian Ethics: A Historical Perspective," *Voice* XV (November–December 1966) :1.

[2] *Ibid.*, 3.

[3] John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 338.

[4] C. Henry Smith, "Mennonites and Culture," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XII (April 1938): 71–84.

[5] See a companion piece from the same year, *Christian Peace: Four Hundred Years of Mennonite Principles and Practices* (Newton, Kan.: Peace Committee of the General Conference of Mennonites, 1938).

[6] Obviously he overlooked the industrial development in Russia and was unable to forsee the economic, cultural and political flowering of Canadian Mennonites in the latter half of the century.

[7] Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church* 2 vols., translated by Olive Wyon (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), I, p. 332.

[8] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 50.

[9] Rosemary Ruether, *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), pp. 21–30.

[10] On the theological harmony see Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America, An Introduction* (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1985).

[11] For the introduction of "enclavement" language to Mennonite scholarship as well as an interesting study of current forms of cultural and psychological enclavement see Miriam E. Warner, "Mennonite Brethren: The Maintenance of Continuity in a Religious Ethnic Group," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1985).

[12] H. W. Lohrenz, "The Early Aims of Tabor College" (separately printed Tabor Day Address, 1944). This section on the early Tabor is adapted with permission from an earlier article "Henry W. Lohrenz and Tabor College," *Mennonite Life* (September 1983): 11–19.

[13] H. W. Lohrenz, "Emphasizing the Essentials in Sunday School Work," *Tabor College Herald* I (September 1912): 10–15.

[14] H. W. Lohrenz, "Contributions of American Mennonite Colleges to Home and Society." See also "What Studies are of Greatest Value?", a commencement address to the Eighth Grade Graduates of Ramona, Kansas (May 1931). Both are in the Lohrenz Papers, Box 6, folder 3, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Fresno).

[15] See Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life* (New York: Association Press, 1934): C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865–1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979); C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951).

¹⁶Tabor College Bluejay, 1908–1916.

¹⁷"The German Language our Ideal," *Tabor College Herald* V (November 1916): 25. B. J. Kiehn, "Der Deutsche und seine Sprache," *Tabor College Herald* I (March 1912): 1–3: Gustav Enss, "Wie gross sollte unser Interesse für das Deutschtum sein und wie ist dasselbe aufrecht zu erhalten?", *Tabor College Herald* V (January 1919): 8–16 are further examples of the high view of German culture.

¹⁸H. W. Lohrenz, "Der Wert der Deutschen Bildung," Lohrenz Papers, Box 1, folder 6. Translation is by James C. Juhnke.

¹⁹John H. Lohrenz, "America's Future," *Tabor College Herald* V (October 1916): 29–30.

²⁰Adolph I. Frantz, "The Future of America," *Tabor College Herald* V (October 1916): 28.

²¹See for example P. F. Wall, "Our Nation's Greatest Problems," *Tabor College Herald* VI (September 1917): 11–14; A. J. Harms, "True Patriotism," *Tabor College Herald* V (May 1916): 24–27; John H. Lohrenz, "The Call of Duty to Tabor College Alumni," *Tabor College Herald* VIII (April 1919): 1–3; and G. M. Doerksen, "An Education," *Tabor College Herald* VI (September 1917): 14–16.

²²*Yearbook of the 45th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Winkler, Manitoba, 1951): 125–127.

²³*Ibid.*, 130–133.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 119.

²⁵I have more fully explored some of these trends, particularly as they appear in the West, in an unpublished essay, "From Pietism to Secularism via Anabaptism: An Informal History of the Changing Ideals and Relationships between Fresno Pacific College and the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1944–1984."

²⁶*Yearbook of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (1951), 132.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 130.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 131.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 133.

³¹Bernard Siegal, "Defensive Structuring and Environmental Stress," *American Journal of Sociology* LXXVI (July 1970): 11–12. I am indebted to Beulah Hostetler who has used Siegal to clarify the history of the Franconia Conference (Mennonite Church) experience in "Defensive Structuring and Codification of Practice: Franconia Mennonite Conference," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LX (July 1986): 429–444 and *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1987).

³²A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde, 1860–1954* (Hillsboro, Kansas: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1955); J. J. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1975); J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire* (Hillsboro, Kansas: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978); G. W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Press, 1984).

³³Milton Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," *Daedalus* 90 (Spring 1961): 220. The scholarship on Mennonite ethnicity is rich. See E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen, 1955); E. K. Francis, "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology* LIV (September 1948): 101–107; Leo Driedger, "Canadian Mennonite Urbanism: Ethnic Villagers or Metropolitian Remnants?," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XLIX (July 1975): 226–241; Calvin Redekop, "Anabaptism and the Ethnic Ghost," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LVII (April 1984): 133–146; and Donald Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Ethnicity," (unpublished essay delivered at a Conference on Mennonite Identity at Conrad Grebel College, May 1986).

³⁴Harry S. Stout, "Ethnicity: The Vital Center of Religion in America," *Ethnicity* 3 (June 1975): 204–224.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 216.

³⁶*Direction* 14 (Fall 1985).

³⁷Wally Kroeker, "'So you're not really one of us': One View of Mennonite Ethnicity," *Christian Leader* 48 (July 23, 1985): 2–4; Jim Coggins, "Since you are Mennonite . . ." *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 25 (May 16, 1986): 2–3; John Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Press, 1987).

38For a good discussion of these issues see the *Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Theology and Education Group, January 6–13, 1978) printed in John Stott and Robert T. Goote, eds., *Gospel and Culture* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979).

39Daniel Bell, *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 10–14.